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Spy Drama's Odd Cast

CIA Clerk, Ghanaian Are Unlikely Duo

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One month after Sharon Marie Scranage and Walter Smith were married, Smith recalls, his wife came home from work one evening, shaken and upset, and told Smith she might have to divorce him.

He said the reason was "that they couldn't find any information" on him in the computers at Scranage's office. It was only then, Smith said, that he learned that his new bride was an employee of the Central Intelligence Agency. "I gave her my [military] discharge papers, and I didn't hear anything else about it," Smith said.

As surprised as Smith, a private security guard, was in 1978 to learn where his new bride worked, he was even more shocked last week to hear that Scranage, now divorced from Smith, had been charged with espionage. She divulged national security secrets to her lover—a native of the West African country of Ghana—while she worked there for the CIA, according to FBI affidavits.

Scranage and her former lover, Michael Agbotui Soussoudis, 39, whom government prosecutors allege is a Ghanaian intelligence operative, are being held without bond in D.C. Jail, charged Thursday with revealing the identities of CIA agents and their Ghanaian informants to Ghanaian intelligence officials.

Scranage, a quiet, churchgoing woman, and Soussoudis, a nighttime reveler who loved discos and had no steady job, seem as poorly matched for each other as they seem unlikely conspirators in an international espionage plot.

Family members and friends, shocked by the news, say that Scranage, 29, hardly resembles their idea of a sophisticated spy. They describe her as a hard-working, deeply

religious woman who sang in her church choir and kept up close ties with her family in Virginia's rural King George County.

A short woman with closely cropped hair, Scranage socialized little and was close-mouthed about her \$22,000-a-year job as a low-level operations support assistant at the CIA, they said. Some associates describe her as somewhat naive and easily intimidated by those stronger than she.

"You could say 'Boo' to Sharon, you know, just holler, and she'd be afraid. You could just frighten her," said Smith, 36. But Smith said she was also savvy enough to know when "somebody was trying to run a con on her."

Scranage was raised by strict Baptist parents in the tiny rural community of Dahlgren in Virgin-

ia's Northern Neck on an inlet of the Potomac River. "They were the best people I ever met," said Smith. "There was no drinking in the house, no cursing in the house; it was just straight up."

As a teen-ager, she sang in the choir at the Greater Little Ark Baptist Church, a red brick, white-steepled building about a mile from the house where she grew up. At King George High School, the only high school in the county, she was a cheerleader and member of the National Honor Society.

"She was a very outgoing, number one kid," said Sid Peterson, who taught Scranage mathematics in her sophomore year.

Despite her activities at the school, "I don't think she had any really close friends," said one classmate who graduated with Scranage.

Friends and many of her family members have seen little of Scranage since she left the Dahlgren community in 1974 to attend business school in Roanoke. She later moved to the Washington area to begin her job with the CIA. But Scranage frequently called and wrote her parents.

"She never told you much about her work," said her mother, Mary Scranage, 61. "She always said she worked for the State Department. I didn't know too much about it."

Scranage was just as circumspect with Walter Smith when they first met in 1978 in the parking lot of the Fort Chapin Park Apartment com-

plex on East Capitol Street. At the time, Scranage was working at an office in Southeast Washington but would always say 'no comment' when Smith asked what she did.

After their wedding in May 1978 they moved to Oxon Hill, where they lived until their divorce in 1979. Part of their problem, Smith said, was that Scranage wanted to go overseas because it would help her get promoted at the CIA and also because "she wanted to see how the other half lives." Smith, who was content to go for long rides on his motorcycle, did not want to leave the country.

Despite her career ambitions, Smith said, the couple led a routine life. "All she would do is go to work, come home, fix dinner and sometimes she'd help me with my work . . . If I had to write something up she'd word it right and then she'd type it up."

Smith said that Scranage, a person who socialized little, frequently read the Bible and sang in the choir of Corinthian Baptist Church at Fifth and I streets NW. "She had a very good voice.

"She was just dedicated; she went to work on time and she always worked." Most weekends they would go to King George to visit her family.

Scranage wrote Smith from Ghana telling him that she liked living there, but describing "how bad people were living over there, you know, the life style, and she was glad she could help them." After her return to the United States in May, she told Smith that "she was glad she lived in this country," he said.

The last time Smith talked to Scranage was in May after her return from Ghana to Alexandria, where she lived with her younger sister, Arzella. Scranage told him that she had been dating another man but had broken it off. They discussed the possibility of getting together again, he said.

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There was one report from Scranage that alarmed her family. About a year ago, at least two men broke into her house in Ghana spewing machinegun fire and killing one of her security guards and her pet dog, according to the Rev. John W. Chapman, pastor of the Little Ark Baptist Church and a close family friend.

Scranage said she escaped by diving out a window and running for safety, he said. Family members, who refuse to elaborate on the event, said Scranage moved to another house and never gave them a hint as to the cause of the incident.

A State Department official yesterday declined comment when asked about the incident.

Most of Scranage's letters to her family, however, were filled with reports of outings to the beach and the new friends she had made in Ghana. Scranage mentioned Soussoudis once, saying she had met him through mutual friends, "but she

didn't dwell on his name," her mother said.

Soussoudis, a thin, mustachioed man, is characterized by one long-time associate as a "good-time guy" who likes whiskey, loves to dance until dawn at discos and has a way with women. He was married to an American woman named Madelen and has a 6-year-old daughter, the associate said. The marriage soured when Soussoudis began seeing other women and using his wife's credit card to entertain them, the acquaintance said.

His former wife declined to talk to a reporter.

Soussoudis once worked at the Ghanaian mission to the United Nations but over long periods did not have a regular job, according to the source, who asked not to be identified. "He has never worked more than six months in his life," he said.

When Ghana's leader, Flight Lt.

Jerry John Rawlings, came to power in December 1981, Soussoudis told friends that he was Rawlings' cousin and he returned to Ghana to live.

Henry Greene, 75, a neighbor in the St. Albans neighborhood in Queens where Soussoudis lived for at least 10 years, said, "The whole thing's a surprise to me. He seemed like a real nice guy. It was a shock."

Scranage was arrested after an investigation that began when her answers on a routine polygraph test following her Ghana tour aroused suspicions, sources said. Scranage has admitted to the FBI that since December 1983 she provided confidential CIA data to Soussoudis, according to FBI affidavits.

Soussoudis was arrested by FBI agents Wednesday at the Springfield Holiday Inn after being lured there by Scranage, who officials said is cooperating with the FBI.

Only her parents seemed to have an inkling that something was amiss when Scranage returned to Dahlgren for a visit just days before her arrest. She seemed preoccupied and kept to herself. "She didn't look so happy," her mother said. "I didn't say too much to her."

As she entered a federal magistrate's court in Alexandria Thursday, Scranage was sobbing.

"I know she's probably going up the creek; she isn't used to that," Smith said. "I was shocked; I still don't believe it. He had to have something on her for her to do something like that."

Was the reason love? "Ain't that much love in the world. Not Sharon; she's too bright a person to do that for love. She loved that job too much."

Staff writer Joe Pichirallo and special correspondent Dody Tsiantar contributed to this report.